1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

of literacy is absolutely essential for the practising lama, and until the Lepchas could be taught Tibetan it was necessary that translations of the scriptures should be available in their own tongue. All the existing Lepcha manuscripts of which I have heard are translations of the Tibetan lamaist scriptures; it is said that some specifically Lepcha compilations of mythology and anecdote have been made and possibly some may have escaped the destructive zeal of fanatical lamas. In Lingthem only one very old lama possessed or could read a Lepcha book.

Nowadays religious instruction is given in Tibetan. In Zongu literacy is exclusively confined to the reading of Tibetan scriptures and has no sort of influence or use in everyday life; lamas who can read religious books and write religious formulas are quite incapable of reading or writing a letter in any language. As will be seen later this factual illiteracy puts the Lepchas at a considerable disadvantage in their commercial transactions. Some of the lamas of Lingthem read the Tibetan scriptures with ease and even fluency; others appeared to me to have learned portions of the scriptures by heart and to know when to turn over the pages; but I was never able to prove this. Tibetan books are printed from wooden blocks in long narrow rectangular pages; to learn to read the pupil gets by heart the contents of one page at a time, only passing on to the next when he has completely mastered and is able to recite the first.

During the second half of the last century one Colonel (later General) G. G. Mainwaring took the Lepchas and their language under his special protection. General Mainwaring was, judging by his literary remains,[4] so perfect a type of the eccentric Indian officer who supports freak religions and fantastic prophecies derived from the pyramids that he seems almost to be an invented caricature. After profound thought General Mainwaring came to the conclusion that not only were the Lepchas the descendants of our first parents, but that—as could be simply shown by a device of the General's called the Power of Letters—Lepcha was the language spoken in the Garden of Eden. Of the people and the language he writes:

'It is impossible that a people with language so comprehensive; with manners, though primitive, so superior, as to entitle

[4] *A Lepcha Grammar*, by Col. G. G. Mainwaring. Calcutta 1876.
Dictionary of the Lepcha Language, compiled by the late General G. Mainwaring, revised and completed by Albert Grünwedel, Berlin, printed and published by order of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India in Council. Berlin 1898.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

from below the top would also revolve; and if one happened to be having a bath at the same time the effect was rather startling until we grew accustomed to expect it. A flange projected from the rim of the drum, and this struck a bell at every turn, thus enabling the worshipper to keep a count, for it would be unwise to finish with an inauspicious number. It had a tinkling sound like the bell in a village shop; and I had only to hear it to be immediately transported to the English countryside.

The upper storey was reached by an outside staircase and contained three rooms. The largest was more or less identical with the main hall below, and also contained an altar, complete with images and books. There were also several fearsome-looking masks, said to represent Lord Konchen, which were used for dances. This room was used as a general store-room: in one corner were a number of printing blocks and apparatus for making paper, also odds and ends of ceremonial equipment, coloured umbrellas, peacocks' feathers, and such-like. Some of the pillars were roughly carved, and decorated with crudely coloured dragon designs. The ceiling was unplastered, and on the beams above a number of immense copper vessels and cooking pots were stored. This was our bedroom, and it always reminded me of the backstage of a theatre set for a Christmas pantomime. It would never have surprised me to see a *Corps de Ballet* come tripping into the room; and when the light was put out the last thing one saw, before dropping off to sleep, was the gilded face of the large central Buddha faintly gleaming in the light of the flickering wick. In the morning we would usually awake to the pattering sound of a bare-footed novice, whose duty it was to refill the seven altar-bowls with water.

There was another small room, little bigger than a cell, which was used by certain monks for the purpose of private meditation. It was only about nine feet square, and its solitary window was heavily swathed in sacking, so as to exclude every particle of light. From time to time one